

Direct Certification

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. *What is Direct Certification?*

- A. All children who participate in the Food Stamp (SNAP) Program and Financial Assistance to Needy Families (FANF) are eligible for Free School Meals. The process of automatically enrolling SNAP and FANF children for free meals is called Direct Certification.

2. Q. *Why is the New Hampshire process of Direct Certification different this year?*

- A. In 2008, the New Hampshire Department of Education developed software that would eliminate the previous paper letter sent by the SNAP office in the Department of Health and Services to all households. Although the letter method was helpful, large numbers of families did not return the letter to their children's school or did not apply for free meals through the paper application. Our research indicated that school meals programs were only capturing approximately 23% of eligible students while the paper form of Direct Certification was in place. Before implementation of the electronic Direct Certification process, the state was unable to capture any categorical data on FANF families. Now both SNAP and FANF families are electronically captured and the data is made available to Local Educational Agencies (LEA).

3. Q. *How do I access the software?*

- A. The software is a part of the Child Nutrition suite of on-line services. To access the software one must be:
1. Identified by password authorization, as the “**submit**” person. This is the designated SAU person or alternate person who submits Child Nutrition meal claims for reimbursement.
 2. Identified as an employee of the district/school/SFA/SAU.

4. Q. *In previous years, the Determining Official (formerly called the Approving Official - the person assigned and trained to manage the parent application systems), could fax over to the Department of Health and Human Services a list or individual student to verify a Food Stamp or FANF number? Can we continue doing this?*

- A. NO, this practice is no longer necessary and the Department of Health and Human Services has stopped supporting this service. Now, the LEA will use the look-up or review the monthly rosters for verification of a student's eligibility.

5. Q. *When is the Direct Certification list updated with new names?*

- A. The roster is updated monthly approximately the 4th or 5th day of each month. Each “submit person” is able to download a new list by the second day of every month. Individual students may be found at any time during any given month. LEAs, by regulation, must update roster data monthly.

6. Q. *When can a student on the Direct Certification roster be counted as FREE?*

- A. A student whose name shows up on the Direct Certification Roster is eligible to have meals claimed for the month the student's name appeared. You may not count students in any previous month.

7. Q. *Using the look-up feature, what date for meal claiming purposes, should be considered, when the eligibility of a student is determined in the middle of a month?*

- A. The roster is determined only once per month at the beginning of each month. Therefore, the student is eligible for the entire month. The date of look-up is critical to the audit trail of the meal claim. Therefore, when you use the look-up method of determining eligibility, print the screen by pressing on your keyboard the Ctrl and Alt key and the Print screen, then paste this document on a word document, date and initial. This step is important to ensuring when you may claim for this child.

8. Q. *What do I do when a student appears on the direct certification roster one month but is not on the roster in any subsequent months?*

- A. When eligibility has been determined, a student is eligible for a year. However, this student may have left the state, the family may have removed the student, or some other event unknown to us may have occurred. The student continues to be eligible for FREE meals for the remainder of the school year. If the student has left the school, you may remove him from your roster.

9. Q. *What do I do when a family completes a parent application and the income does not make the children FREE, but the children in the family show up on the Direct Certification roster?*

- A. The Direct Certification of the children through the Food Stamp Office is a verified determination of family status and income. The Child Nutrition Programs accepts all Food Stamp determinations. Therefore, the children listed on the Direct Certification roster must be considered categorically FREE. The LEA must disregard the paper application. Direct Certification takes precedent over an application submitted by a household.

10. Q. *What should I do when there are two or more siblings listed on a paper application and only one sibling shows up on the Direct Certification roster?*

- A. According to the USDA August 2009 memo, when one sibling in a household meets the requirements of Direct Certification and is eligible, then all children in the household are considered categorically eligible. (www.education.nh.gov/program/nutrition/direct_certification/documents/sp_38_extending_benefits.pdf)

11. Q. *The LEA is sure that a student is on Food Stamps yet, they have not shown up on a roster and a name look-up is saying ineligible. What should we do?*

- A. 1. The look-up system is VERY sensitive. The software was written to look at the SASID # and the EXACT name as submitted to Food Stamps and the Date of Birth of the student. You may also add a gender; however, this too must be accurate. If you call Susannah Hanna- Susie Q. Hanna, the software will reject this name data. The name and the DOB must be exactly as they family indicated with SNAP or FANF office.
2. At this time, there is no Wildcard look-up. In other words, it is expected that you will have exact information regarding a student's name and DOB or SASID #.

12. Q. *Do we have to communicate to the parents that their children have been listed on the Direct Certification roster or look-up feature?*

- A. Yes, the LEA must notify the household that the child is eligible for Free meals, that no other application is necessary, how to notify the LEA if the family wants to decline the meal benefits. Eligible children may

receive benefits immediately. The LEA may assume consent if refusal has not been received within a few days. The LEA may determine through their policies how many days will be accepted.

13. Q. *What do we do when a student shows up on the Direct Certification roster yet the family insists they are not eligible for the benefits?*

A. Please refer to Question # 12. Parents may decline the benefit provided to their children.

14. Q. *On the monthly school claim report, what do the (DC) numbers represent under the application column?*

A. This number represents the number of students identified on the Direct Certification roster AS OF THE CLAIM SUBMISSION date. This number will not show the number of DC students a school may have in any given month, but will only show the – AS OF CLAIM SUBMISSION total. It was the intent that managers would see a difference from the printed copy of the previous month and go in and capture the new students.

15. Q. *What is the acceptable age of the Direct Certification data?*

A. As addressed in question # 5, data should be no older than four calendar weeks. Thus, downloading a monthly roster, looking up students immediately, will yield current data. As previously stated, each LEA is responsible for documenting the date of any look-up.

16. Q. *Do I verify families' income when they have submitted a paper application but show up on the Direct Certification roster?*

A. From question # 7, Direct Certification trumps a paper application; therefore, all children on the Direct Certification roster or look-up must not be included in the Verification sample pool. The students identified as eligible for free meals through Direct Certification must be included on the Verification Summary Report under question #4-1a. DO NOT pull Direct Certification eligible students into the sample pool for verification purposes.

17. Q. *How will the LEA pass an audit test for the Directly Certificated students?*

A. Each LEA is responsible for identifying students who are eligible for Free meals. They are also responsible for identifying when the student was eligible. As of today, the roster and the individual look-up do not have dates. Therefore, each "submit person" assigned to download DC information MUST date and initial each positive look-up. Each roster should also be dated and initialed.

18. Q. *How long am I required to maintain the Direct Certification records?*

A. As with all Child Nutrition records, Direct Certification rosters and look-ups must be maintained for three years after the submission of a final claim for reimbursement for the fiscal year which they apply. If there is an ongoing audit, the records must be maintained for the duration of the audit as required for resolution of the issues raised by the audit.